

Academic Advising as Perceived by Business Students

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Business students' perceptions concerning several academic advising resources are presented. Using a Likert scale, students evaluated resources such as their academic advisor, course instructors, staffs, friends, and parents as well as the university catalog and the Foundations of Business Administration (FBA) course. Selected demographic information was also collected. Results show that students ranked the FBA course, which provides an overview of an individual's 4-year study plan, as the most helpful. The course instructors and academic advisors were ranked second and fourth, respectively. Enrollment status, declared major, and gender were related to students' views on some advising resources, but transfer status was not. Moreover, we found some connection between the effectiveness of advising resources perceived by students and the students' developmental stages.

KEY WORDS: advising resources, first-year students, faculty advisors, freshman seminars, satisfaction with advising, student development theory

Relative emphasis: practice, research, theory

Most educators would agree that good academic advising is vital to student success with academic choices. Hunter and White (2004, p. 21) stated, "Academic advising, well developed and appropriately accessed, is perhaps the only structured campus endeavor that can guarantee students' sustained interaction with a caring and concerned adult who can help them shape such an experience." Hunter and White, along with other authors focusing on student development, recommended implementing a program for the first-year seminar course to assist undergraduate students with advising. They also suggested that a mission statement as well as goals and objectives be developed with regard to academic advising. Saving and Keim (1998) found a discrepancy between student perceptions and faculty member perceptions of advising. Tuttle (2000) stated that personnel from student affairs, the department, career center, counseling department, and admissions office, as well as faculty members and academic advisors, must also be held accountable for the success of the student.

Astin (1993, 1999a, 1999b) discussed the positive effects of student involvement and student

development. He identified the importance of students developing key relationships with faculty members, collaborating with other students, and participating in an active learning environment in which programs designed to promote student success are continually developed. We know that faculty members are often criticized for not taking an active role in the development of their advisees.

To take a step toward better advising for students, the College of Business (COB) faculty at our college developed a seminar course, Foundations of Business Administration (FBA). The FBA is a 1-credit interdisciplinary course designed with the following four objectives, which have been organized to benefit the student's development in the course and also to meet the standards of The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business:

- to provide students with an opportunity to investigate their goals, interests, skills, and abilities so that they can make informed choices and meet their personal goals through a meaningful university experience.
- to begin the integration process by providing a platform on which to build student understanding of the different functional areas in business, how they work in concert for the benefit of the organization, and how this breadth of knowledge will benefit students in working toward and meeting their goals.
- to provide exposure to a breadth of university experiences, both educational and extracurricular, and to suggest ways in which students can make these experiences work together toward accomplishing their goals.
- to provide exposure for students regarding possible careers in business.

Student preparation of a 4-year study plan is a major requirement for passing the course successfully. This 4-year study plan (or two plans for students in two majors) includes the student's personal goals and outlines major course work, general education requirements, and free electives the student intends to take. Each student works in class with the instructor to develop his or her personalized plan before scheduling classes. The student also discusses the study plan with her or his advisor.

For successful completion of this course, students rely heavily on the support of faculty advisors.

These faculty-student relationships are imperative for the students to feel involved in their program and to make the proper scheduling decisions, which will ultimately lead to graduating from the program and gaining access to a career. We believe that in conjunction with the FBA course, faculty members, especially the faculty member who discusses and signs off on the study plan with the student, have become more engaged with students as a result of the FBA course.

In addition, students taking the FBA course are required to attend at least two club meetings sponsored by individual majors. These activities give students opportunities to interact with other students and learn more about the course requirements as well as the potential career path for the particular major. They also provide the settings for the students to engage in casual conversations with faculty members. The FBA course was designed to assist students with a successful transition from high school to college by encouraging them to be actively involved with their academic advisors and to have developed relationships with other students and faculty members.

Through the FBA course, students are introduced and encouraged to use various advising resources such as academic advisors, staff members, friends, parents, course instructors, and the university catalog. Most students have come to understand the process of academic advising and have experienced the benefits of it. This is, therefore, congruent with the mission and goals of academic advising at our institution, which are modeled after the NACADA Core Values of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2004) and the Council for the Advancement of Standards (2005) standards and guidelines.

In this study, we used a survey format to examine student views about the usefulness of several advising resources on our campus. We also explored possible connections between students' views of various academic-advising resources and the students' developmental stages as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) developed one of the first theories to examine the psychosocial development of college students. The theory is explained through seven vectors. The first four vectors are the most commonly used when colleges design first-year seminars because they encompass developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. These four vectors may be developed, through the

honing of critical thinking and reasoning skills, in or out of the classroom. Chickering and Reisser's fifth, sixth, and seventh vectors may be observed as the student progress through college: establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. They correspond with first-year seminars designed to aid in the student's transition and personal growth.

Method

Respondents

A survey was designed to assess students' views of several advising resources on our campus: advisors, course instructors, department staff, friends, and classmates as well as the university catalog and the FBA course. The survey was distributed to students in the FBA classes at the end of both fall 2005 and spring 2006. In an attempt to obtain more accurate information, we did not collect information about the personal identity of the respondents. A total of 254 students were enrolled in the course, and 227 students (89.4%) responded to the survey. Students used a 5-point Likert scale anchored from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* to evaluate the advising resources. Some demographic information, including age, gender, enrollment status, and status of major, was also collected. Our objective was to evaluate students' perceptions on several advising resources, such as advisors, course instructors, staff members, friends, and parents as well as the FBA and the university catalog.

Only three seniors responded to the survey, and we believed that their experiences and perceptions in advising would most likely be different than that of the underclassmen. Therefore, their responses were excluded from the study, and as a result, we included 224 responses in the analysis. The sample consisted of 62.5% freshmen, 22.8% sophomores, and 14.7% juniors. Of the sample 20.1% were transfer students. The gender compositions were 62.6% male and 37.4% female, which are similar to that of the entire COB population. The majority of the students (72.9%) had declared a major. The average age of students in the sample was 19 years, which is slightly younger than the general COB population. The data consisted of 88.1% Caucasians, 3.5% African Americans, 1.8% Asians, and 0.9% Hispanics; the ethnicity of the rest of the respondents (5.7%) is unknown. Compared with the population from which the sample was drawn, Caucasian and Asian students were slightly underrepresented and African American students were slightly overrepresented. The percentage of Hispanic

students in our sample data was similar to that of the general COBpopulation.

Procedure

To explore the data further, we constructed several frequency distribution tables. Normality was also checked for all Likert-scaled variables. To compare the responses from freshmen to that of sophomores and juniors combined, we performed several *t* tests. A number of chi-square tests were also conducted so we could study the relationship between several variables. The data revealed some surprising and interesting findings.

Results

Table 1 shows that 82.1% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the FBA course was useful as an academic planning and advising resource. Students rated the following resources highly (i.e., they agreed or strongly agreed that they were useful) as follows: course instructors, 77.2%; friends, 71.7%; academic advisor, 70.1%; catalog, 68.3%; parents, 63.0%; staff members, 58.9%. Respondents ranked advisors in fourth place as a useful advising resource. However, 75.5% of students felt that their advisors were willing to answer questions regarding course requirements; 13.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed that advisors were useful to them. In addition, 73.1% of students indicated that their advisors had discussed their 4-year study plan with them. While 13.2% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed about advisor discussions of academic planning, it should be noted that students taking the FBA course are required to discuss the study plan with their advisors.

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the responses to the item regarding advising resource usefulness (1= *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*). The FBA course received the highest mean score while advisors were ranked fourth.

We conducted a number of chi-square tests and found that students who transferred from another col-

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the responses to survey items regarding advisor resources (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*)

Advising Resource	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Advisor	224	2.192	1.1458
Course instructors	224	2.107	.9598
Departmental staff	224	2.371	.9664
Foundation course	223	1.910	1.1195
Catalog	224	2.201	1.0838
Friends, classmates, roommates	215	2.074	1.0385
Parents	215	2.274	1.1124
Advisor discussed study plan	212	2.132	1.1360
Advisor was willing to answer questions	212	1.967	1.2596

lege did not have significantly different perceptions than the other students in the study concerning the usefulness of any of the advising resources ($p > .10$). However, a chi-square test indicated that a significantly larger percentage of male students agreed or strongly agreed that their advisors were willing to answer questions ($\chi^2[4, N = 212] = 10.21, p = 0.038$), and the male advisees also held a more favorable view about their advisor than did the female students ($\chi^2[4, N = 212] = 7.82, p = 0.09$). In addition, students who had declared a major relied on the course instructor ($\chi^2[4, N = 224] = 9.99, p = 0.041$) and catalog ($\chi^2[4, N = 224] = 9.15, p = 0.058$) significantly more than did those who had not declared a major. The majority of freshmen (73%) had declared a major. Chi-square tests showed that these students used course instructors and the catalog as academic advising resources significantly more than did freshmen who had not chosen a major. Also, they had a more positive view of the FBA course. Moreover, sophomores and juniors who had declared a major perceived the usefulness of academic advisors and the FBA course differently than did their counterparts who were undeclared.

Table 1 Percentages of students responding to the following survey item: These advising resources are useful to me.

Level of Agreement	Advising Resources						
	FBA	Staffs	Instructor	Friends	Advisor	Catalog	Parents
Strongly agree	44.4	17.4	25.0	34.0	30.8	28.6	27.4
Agree	37.7	41.5	52.2	37.7	39.3	39.7	35.6
Neutral	5.8	31.7	12.9	18.6	16.5	19.6	24.7
Disagree	6.7	5.4	6.7	6.5	6.7	7.1	6.0
Strongly disagree	5.4	4.0	3.1	3.3	6.7	4.9	6.0

Sophomores and juniors who had declared a major viewed their advisor and FBA course as more significant and useful resources. Furthermore, we found that the enrollment status significantly affected students' perceptions on all the advising resources except parents. Therefore, we compared the responses from freshmen to those from sophomores and juniors.

Figure 1 shows the comparisons of students' perceptions on the usefulness of several advising resources in terms of percentages of agree and strongly agree. The level of usefulness perceived by students for all advising resources was higher for freshmen except on the category of department staff. We suspect that most freshmen have much less contact with the department staff than do older students and that this accounts for the differences in their responses. Figure 1 shows that freshmen value and rely on their friends for academic advice more often than do sophomores and juniors. Both groups of students scored the FBA course and course instructors as the two most useful resources. When the mean and standard deviation of the ratings given by respondents for these two groups were calculated and compared, as shown in Table 3, the results are consistent with the data depicted

in Figure 1.

Histogram and normal probability graphs were used to verify the normal distribution of all Likert-scale variables. We found that all these variables were approximately normally distributed. As a result, we used *t* tests to conduct statistical inferences that determine whether or not freshmen would have significantly different perceptions in advising resources than their sophomore and junior counterparts ($p < .05$). Table 3 shows the differences in mean and standard deviation of ratings given by freshmen and their junior and senior peers on several advising resources. Based on two independent *t* tests, the mean value given by freshmen on the usefulness of departmental staff was found to be significantly lower than that given by sophomores and juniors ($p = 0.006$). Freshmen rated friends as resources higher than did upperclassmen ($p = 0.002$). Moreover, *t* tests showed no significant difference in the views of the two sets of students on other advising resources.

Data further suggest that most freshmen had moved through the first two vectors of development as described Chickering and Reisser (1993) and were developing autonomy as described by the third vector. The freshmen benefited from the FBA

Figure 1 Comparison of student perceptions of advising resources

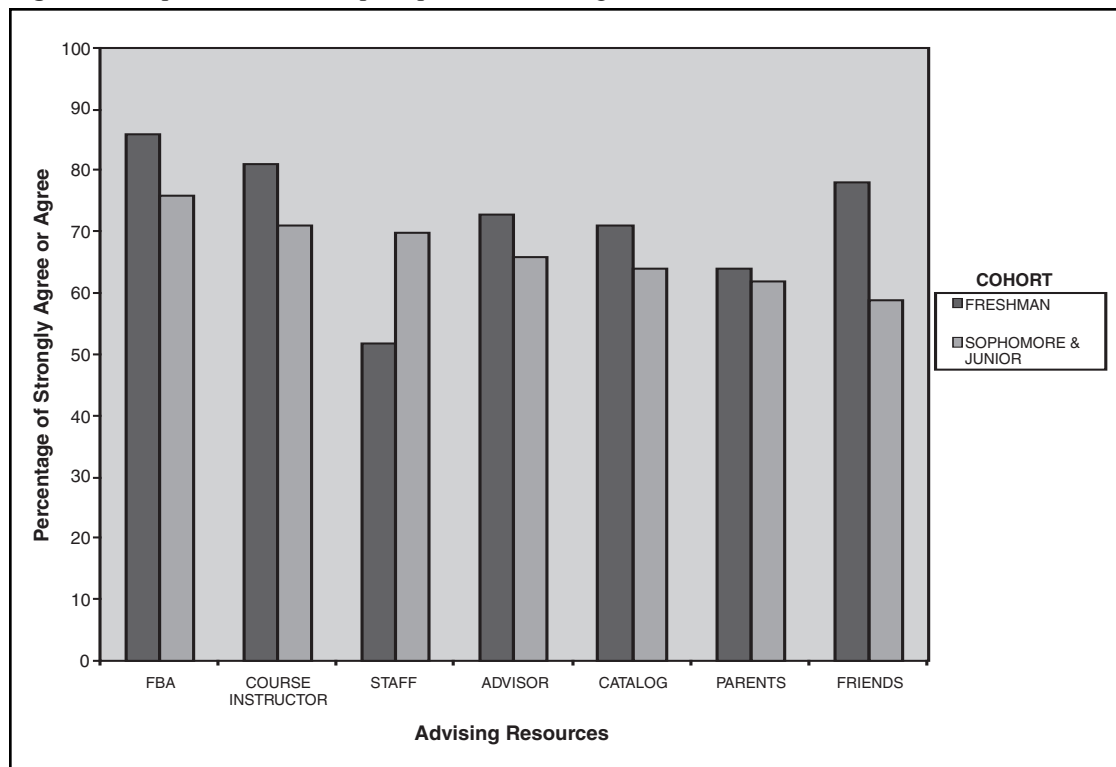


Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the responses for the freshman and sophomore-junior cohorts
(1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*)

Advising Resource	Freshman		Sophomore-Junior	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
FBA course	1.814	1.0967	2.072	1.1453
Course instructors	2.050	.9393	2.202	.9913
Departmental staff	2.507	.9483	2.143	.9587
Friends, classmates, roommates	1.914	.9362	2.368	1.1529
Advisors	2.136	1.1138	2.286	1.1981
Catalog	2.150	1.0657	2.286	1.1148
Parents	2.259	1.0723	2.303	1.1891
Advisor discussed study plan	2.096	1.1081	2.197	1.1891
Advisor was willing to answer questions	1.949	1.2069	2.000	1.3565

course, academic advising, and course instructors, and they had experienced competence development. They were able to communicate with their advisor and did not depend heavily on their parents for academic advice. However, freshmen seemed to be swayed by the opinions of their peers much more than were sophomores or juniors.

We found that 13.4% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that their advisors were a useful advising resource. We conducted a study on this dissatisfied group to determine the reasons that they ranked their advisors so unfavorably and to learn more about their perceptions of other advising resources. Of this group, 83.3% had declared a major, 53.3% were freshmen, 23.3% were sophomores, 23.3% were juniors, and 56.7% were female. The average age of this group was 19 years, and 43.3% had a grade-point average (GPA) between 3.0 and 4.0.

Table 4 shows the comparisons in perceived usefulness of advising resources between the group who had disagreed or strongly disagreed that advisors were useful resources and the other respon-

dents. Students who had rated advisors as unuseful resources had given their parents the highest scores. They rated the other resources in the following descending order: FBA course, friends, course instructors, catalog, and then staff. Also, the percentages of agreed or strongly agreed on the usefulness of these resources were lower than they were for the other students. In addition, only 15.4% of students in the dissatisfied group agreed or strongly agreed that their advisors discussed study plans with them, and no students agreed or strongly agreed that their advisors were willing to answer questions. This group of students showed no positive relationship with their advisors and was generally unhappy with academic advising. They depended heavily on their parents and friends for academic advising.

Based on these findings, we believe that this subset of students is in the first two stages of development described by Chickering and Reisser (1993): These advisees show some level of development in competence as demonstrated by their mean GPA and their positive view on the FBA course. However,

Table 4 Comparison of the advising rating of resources by the cohort who indicated dissatisfaction with advisors and the rest of the sample

Advising Resource	Percentage of Agree and Strongly Agree Responses	
	Dissatisfied with Advisors <i>n</i> = 30	Entire Sample <i>N</i> = 194
Parents	59.30	62.80
FBA	46.70	81.40
Friends	44.40	71.60
Course Instructor	43.30	77.10
Catalog	36.70	67.80
Staff	33.30	59.50
Advisor	0.00	70.00

Note. Respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that advisors were helpful resources are referred to as *dissatisfied with advisors*.

they had difficulty interacting and communicating with their advisors. Also, they were unable to take full advantage of advising resources available to them at the college. Instead, they turned to their parents for academic advice.

Conclusion

In this study, we surveyed students' views of the usefulness of several campus advising resources. The results show that, regardless of enrollment status, the students perceive the FBA course as the most useful academic advising resource. They also validated the contention that the FBA course is effective and valuable to students in the COB. Staffs, course instructors, friends, academic advisors, and the university catalog were all important and integral parts of advising resources for students. The more advanced students made more use of advising resources, as did students who had chosen a major, than did their peers. More male students felt their advisors were willing to answer questions. According to students' responses, their academic advisor was fourth in the list of importance; however, the mean scores indicate that advisors were rated positively and the differences between means scores were within one standard deviation of each other.

In studying the small segment of students who indicated the most unfavorable view of their advisors as an advising resource, we found that they were also less satisfied with other advising resources than were their peers. They also believed that their advisors were not willing to help them. Data show that they relied heavily on parents and friends for advice. These students reported the FBA as the second most useful resource.

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance and the success of the first-year seminar course to assist in academic advising for business students. A complete assessment of the FBA course or the advising program has yet to be conducted. Nevertheless, the administration has noticed that the number of seniors who have not met their course requirements for graduation due to incorrect course scheduling has declined. We believe that a similar course would also be beneficial for students in nonbusiness majors. The overall view the students hold about their advisors could be improved in other departments. Encouraging faculty members to attend the workshops planned by the university could improve the relationship and quality of interactions between the advisor and advisee.

Results of this study also suggest a link between the development of students and their views on

various advising resources. Thus, a working knowledge of student development theory could also be helpful for academic advisors. Such information would provide a guide to assist individual students in reaching their goals. In addition, a study to determine if perceptions of advising resources change as students progress from freshman to senior status would yield interesting data.

We plan to engage faculty members by communicating the importance and the success of the first-year seminar course in academic advising. This course can help meet the needs of undergraduates and improve their perceptions of their college experience with respect to advising resources. Although not designed to measure student development, the survey identified some connections between how students view various academic advising resources and their developmental stages as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993).

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